

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9946

INFO AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

USCINCEUR

AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MADRID 5687

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SP

SUBJ: FRANCO'S REASSUMPTION OF POWERS AS
CHIEF OF STATE

REF: MADRID 5504

1. SUMMARY: REACTION TO FRANCO'S UNEXPECTEDLY
EARLY REASSUMPTION OF FULL POWERS OF CHIEF OF STATE HAS
BEEN MIXED. MOVE HAD ADVANTAGE OF RELIEVING JUAN CARLOS
OF AWKWARD AND AMBIGUOUS ROLE OF ACTION CHIEF OF
STATE. WHOLE EPISODE OF JUAN CARLOS' TEMPORARY
ACCESSION AS CHIEF OF STATE MAY HAVE WEAKENED PRINCE IN
EYES OF CERTAIN SECTORS WHO BELIEVE HE DID NOT EXERT
HIMSELF SUFFICIENTLY IN THIS INTERIM CAPACITY.
ON OTHER HAND, IT PROVIDED DRESS REHEARSAL FOR WHAT WILL
HAPPEN UPON FRANCO'S DEMISE AND AUGURS WELL FOR A
SMOOTH AND ORDERLY SUCCESSION. A QUESTION MARK IS WHAT
EFFECT FRANCO'S RETURN WILL HAVE WITH RESPECT TO PRIME
MINISTER ARIAS' PROGRAM OF MODERATE LIBERALIZATION. JUAN
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CARLOS NOW EXPECTED TO REVERT TO HIS FORMER, LARGELY

CEREMONIAL ROLE. PROFESSED OPTIMISM OF GOVT, FAMILY, AND MEDICAL TEAM ABOUT FRANCO'S RECOVERY HAVE NOT FULLY DISPELLED DOUBTS ABOUT HIS RECOVERY. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE FRANCO REASSUMED HIS FULL POWERS AS CHIEF OF STATE ON SEPT 2 (REFTEL) THE GOVT AND NEWS MEDIA HAVE STRESSED FRANCO'S REPORTED COMPLETE RECUPERATION FROM HIS THROMBOPHLEBITIS AND CONVEYED THE IMPRESSION THE CAUDILLO IS COMPLETELY UP TO THE TASK OF GOVERNING ONCE AGAIN. IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN THIS OPTIMISTIC AND REASSURING IMPRESSION, TELEVISION AND THE PRESS-- WITH GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGEMENT--HAVE SHOWN FRANCO DURING RECENT DAYS PLAYING GOLF AT HIS SUMMER RETREAT IN GALACIA AND FEATURED COMMENTS OF FAMILY AND CLOSE ASSOCIATES ASSERTING FRANCO'S GOOD HEALTH. NOTWITHSTANDING THIS OFFICIAL OPTIMISM, THERE STILL REMAINS, HOWEVER, A WIDESPREAD UNDERCURRENT OF FEELING THAT FRANCO HAS BY NO MEANS FULLY RECOVERED HIS HEALTH.

3. VARIOUS POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS NOW BEING OFFERED FOR FRANCO'S UNEXPECTED EARLY REASSUMPTION OF FULL POWERS. THESE INCLUDE: (1) INTENSE PRESSURES FROM HIS FAMILY AND IMMEDIATE ENTOURAGE, PARTICULARLY FROM HIS WIFE AND SON-IN-LAW, ON FRANCO TO REASSUME HIS FULL POWERS AS A WAY OF POSSIBLY INSURING THEIR CONTINUED POWER AND INFLUENCE AND TO AVOID GROWTH OF PUBLIC CLIMATE IN WHICH FRANCO'S WITHDRAWAL MIGHT COME TO BE ACCEPTED AS PERMANENT; (2) FRANCO'S NATURAL INSTINCTS TO REASSUME FULL POWERS AS SOON AS HE WAS PHYSICALLY ABLE TO DO SO; (3) POSSIBLE CONCERN BY FRANCO AND HIS ENTOURAGE AND FAMILY OVER SEEMING LIBERAL INTENTIONS OF JUAN CARLOS AND PRIME MINISTER ARIAS AS DEMONSTRATED IN INCREASING CONTACTS WITH CENTER AND MODERATE LEFT OPPOSITION GROUPS; AND (4) A DESIRE TO END JUAN CARLOS' AWKWARD SITUATION IN WHICH HE WAS ACTING CHIEF OF STATE, BUT IN WHICH FRANCO WAS WATCHING CLOSELY OVER HIS SHOULDERS AND CONTINUED TO CALL MAJOR SHOTS.

3. REACTION TO FRANCO'S REASSUMPTION OF FULL POWERS HAS BEEN MIXTED, DEPENDING ON POLITICAL OUTLOOK. THE MORE CONFIDENTIAL

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CONSERVATIVE REGIME POLITICAL GROUPS HAVE BEEN HIGHLY PLEASED AND REASSURED. THE MORE MODERATE REGIME LIBERALIZERS, WHILE EXPRESSING THEIR SATISFACTION, ARE SOMEWHAT UNEASY OVER THE CAUDILLO'S REASSUMPTION OF FULL POWERS. MOST OF THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION: WHICH HAD COMMENCED TO ACT AS IF FRANCO HAD ALREADY PASSED FROM THE SCENE, ARE VERY DISAPPOINTED.

4. FRANCO'S MOVE HAS HAD THE DECIDED ADVANTAGE OF RELIEVING JUAN CARLOS FROM THE UNCOMFORTABLE AND AMBIGUOUS ROLE IN WHICH HE HAD BEEN SERVING AS ACTING CHIEF OF STATE SINCE JULY 19. HOWEVER, WHILE THIS MOVE SATISFIED THOSE REGIME FORCES WHO WANTED FRANCO TO REASSUME FULL POWERS, IT WAS A DISAPPOINTMENT TO THOSE IN THE OPPOSITION AND SOME OF THE REGIME LIBERALIZERS WHO THOUGHT THAT FRANCO SHOULD TERMINATE THIS UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION BY HAVING JUAN CARLOS SWORN IN AS KING.

5. ANOTHER EFFECT WHOLE EPISODE MAY HAVE HAD IS TO WEAKEN JUAN CARLOS IN EYES OF CERTAIN SECTORS WHO FELT THAT HE DID NOT ASSERT HIMSELF SUFFICIENTLY WHILE HE HAD OPPORTUNITY AS ACTING CHIEF OF STATE AND BELIEVE JUAN CARLOS MAY NOW BE SOMEWHAT TAINTED WITH RESPECT TO HIS FUTURE SUCCESSION. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE MANY WHO BELIEVE JUAN CARLOS COMPORTED HIMSELF WELL UNDER THESE DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES AND DEMONSTRATED PATRIOTISM, PRUDENCE, AND STATESMANSHIP.

6. THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT JUAN CARLOS' STINT AS ACTING CHIEF OF STATE WAS POSITIVE IN THAT IT PROVIDED A DRESS REHEARSAL OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN FRANCO DOES PASS FROM THE SCENE, AND THAT THE DIGNIFIED CALM AND TRANQUILITY WITH WHICH IT WAS ACCEPTED, AND THE SMOOTH AND EFFECTIVE MANNER IN WHICH SPAIN'S CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS WERE IMPLEMENTED AUGUR WELL FOR THE REAL EVENT WHEN IT COMES.

7. ONE OF THE UNKNOWN IS HOW FRANCO'S REASSUMPTION OF FULL POWERS WILL AFFECT THE PROGRAM OF MODERATE LIBERALIZATION LAUNCHED BY PRESIDENT ARIAS ON FEB 12. THERE IS SOME UNEASE IN THIS RESPECT AMONG REGIME
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LIBERALIZERS. SOME OBSERVERS EVEN BELIEVE ONE OF THE REASONS FRANCO MAY HAVE REASSUMED FULL POWERS WAS THAT HE MAY HAVE BECOME CONCERNED OVER INDICATIONS OF LIBERAL INTENTIONS ON THE PART OF JUAN CARLOS AND PRESIDENT ARIAS, ACTING JOINTLY. THEY ALSO BELIEVE FRANCO MAY HAVE VIEWED WITH CONSIDERABLE MISGIVINGS THE VARIOUS TELEPHONIC AND OTHER CONSULTATIONS WHICH JUAN CARLOS MAINTAINED WITH HIS FATHER, DON JUAN, DURING THE PRINCE'S BRIEF TENURE AS ACTING CHIEF OF STATE.

8. FRANCO'S REASSUMPTION OF POWERS HAS ALSO HAD THE EFFECT OF UPSETTING
AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT, VARIOUS REPORTED EMBRYONIC MOVES AND MANEUVERS AND JOCKEYING
FOR POSITION AMONG DIFFERENT OPPOSITION AND REGIME GROUPS

AND INDIVIDUALS WHICH HAD RECENTLY COMMENCED WHEN MOST
BELIEVED POST-FRANCO ERA WAS AT HAND.

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9. IT IS WIDELY EXPECTED THAT JUAN CARLOS WILL NOW REVERT
TO THE ROLE HE HAD PRIOR TO JULY 19, E.E., A CEREMONIAL
ROLE IN THE BACKGROUND WHERE HE IS NOT REQUIRED TO MAKE
DECISIONS, WHICH ROLE, WHILE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR HIM, WILL
BE NOWHERE NEAR AS UNCOMFORTABLE AS WAS HIS ROLE AS
ACTING CHIEF OF STATE. IT IS POSSIBLE THE PRINCE MAY BE
GIVEN SOME OF THE NORMAL CEREMONIAL FUNCTIONS OF FRANCO,
WHO MAY WELL BE PHYSICALLY UNABLE TO SUSTAIN THE PACE OF DAILY
AUDIENCES AND CEREMONIAL APPEARANCES WHICH HE MAINTAINED
BEFORE HIS HOSPITALIZATION. A RETURN TO JUAN CARLOS' PASSIVE
ROLE AND SILENCE ON POLITICAL MATTERS MAY BE CONSIDERED THE MOST
PRUDENT ONE FOR HIM AT THIS JUNCTURE, SINCE HE IS AWARE THAT
FRANCO STILL RETAINS THE ULTIMATE POWER TO CHANGE HIS 1969
DECISION REGARDING THE SUCCESSION SHOULD HE SO DESIRE.

10. IT IS ALLEGED THAT FRANCO'S WIFE WOULD STILL LIKE
TO SEE HER GRANDDAUGHTER BECOME QUEEN OF SPAIN, IF THERE
WERE ANY WAY ALFONSO DE BORDON COULD BE DESIGNATED SUCCESSOR

IN PLACE OF JUAN CARLOS, ALTHOUGH FEW PERSONS SERIOUSLY SUGGEST
THAT THIS MIGHT BE A POSSIBILITY AND SUCH A MOVE CERTAINLY
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WOULD PROVOKE SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES AND BITTER DIVISIONS.

11. COMMENT: WHILE FAMILY PRESSURES, CONCERN OVER DIRECTION
OF EVENTS UNDER JUAN CARLOS, AND DESIRE TO END PRINCE'S
AWKWARD SITUATION MAY WELL HAVE HAD BEARING ON CAUDILLO'S
DECISION, I CONSIDER FRANCO'S OWN ESSENTIAL TENACITY TOWARD
HIS POWERS, DEMONSTRATED OVER 36 YEARS, TO BE FUNDAMENTAL
CONSIDERATION. HIS NATURAL POSSESSIVENESS MAY HAVE BEEN
REINFORCED IN THIS CASE BY FEELING THAT ONLY HE CAN EFFECTIVELY
MANAGE TRICKY PROBLEMS FACING SPAIN DURING NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS,
SUCH AS CONFLICT WITH MOROCCO, ECONOMIC PRESSURES, AND CLAMOR
FOR POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION.

12. WE HAVE NO CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE OF FRANCO'S MEDICAL CONDITION.
ACTIONS AND STATEMENTS OF FRANCO ADVISORS AND GOVT LEADING UP
TO AND SUBSEQUENT TO FRANCO'S REASSUMPTION OF POWERS STRONGLY
IMPLY THAT FRANCO'S HEALTH NO LONGER IMMEDIATE PROBLEM, AND
HE MUST BE IMPROVED TO HAVE RESUMED POWERS. BUT IT IS DIFFICULT
TO AVOID FEELING THAT ATTITUDE IS CALCULATEDLY OPTIMISTIC
AND BASED ON MEDICAL FINDINGS THAT MAY BE IN PART SELF-
SERVING. AUGUST 31 MEDICAL BULLETIN REVEALED THAT TEAM
OF DOCTORS WHO INITIALLY ATTENDED FRANCO AT ONSET OF ILLNESS
IN JULY, INCLUDING LONG-TIME PERSONAL PHYSICIAN VICENTE GIL,
HAVE NOW BEEN COMPLETELY REPLACED. NEW TEAM SAID TO BE CON-
STITUTED OF PHYSICIANS SUGGESTED BY OR ENJOYING CONFIDENCE
OF DR. MARTINEZ-BORDIU, FRANCO'S SON-IN-LAW, WHO HAS ASSUMED
KEY ROLE IN FRANCO FAMILY COUNCILS. OFFICIAL ASSURANCES
NOTWITHSTANDING, WE TEND TO SHARE DOUBTS PREVALENT AMONG MANY
POLITICALLY-MINDED SPANIARDS THAT FRANCO, AT AGE 81, COULD HAVE
RECOVERED SO DRAMATICALLY IN LESS THAN TWO MONTHS FROM ILLNESS
WHICH BROUGHT HIM VIRTUALLY TO HIS DEATHBED.

13. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT FRANCO DEPARTED FROM HIS
ROUTINE OF YEARS TO RETURN TO MADRID EARLY (ON SEPTEMBER 9)
WITHOUT GOING TO SAN SEBASTIAN. HIS USUAL ROUTINE HAS BEEN
TO GO BY YACHT FROM GALICIA TO SAN SEBASTIAN AND TO HOLD
A COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING THERE IN MID-SEPTEMBER.
IN FACT THAT HE HAS DEPARTED FROM THIS ROUTINE, THUS ACCEPTING
THE POLITICAL LIABILITY OF NOT VISITING THE BASQUE PROVINCES
AND HOLDING A COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING THERE, IS AN INDICATION
THAT HIS HEALTH IS NOT AS GOOD AS IT PREVIOUSLY WAS.
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